

## Yupik language instruction in Gambell (Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska)

## Enseignement de la langue Yupik à Gambell (île Saint-Laurent, Alaska)

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Volume 29, numéro 1-2, 2005

Préserver la langue et les savoirs  
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URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/013944ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/013944ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.  
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

### ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)  
1708-5268 (numérique)

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### Citer cet article

Koonooka, C. P. (2005). Yupik language instruction in Gambell (Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska). *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 29(1-2), 251–266.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/013944ar>

### Résumé de l'article

La première partie de cet article concerne le présent statut de l'enseignement de la langue yupik à Gambell, île Saint-Laurent (Alaska). Des problèmes surgirent après l'abandon, par ses partisans et enseignants, du programme de langue yupik des écoles de Gambell qui y avait du succès depuis 25 ans. Il devint plus difficile de faire fonctionner le programme à cause de changements fédéraux et de l'état dans l'éducation, mais la commission scolaire et l'école gardèrent tout de même les enseignants yupiget afin de ramener le programme yupik à ce qu'il était. La deuxième partie de cet article est une description personnelle d'un récent projet sur la langue et la publication d'une traduction anglaise et de la transcription yupik d'anciens récits du folklore yupik sibérien originellement recueillis et publiés dans la langue yupik en utilisant l'orthographe cyrillique russe, afin qu'ils puissent être utilisés à l'école. Des barrières politiques et sociales avaient empêché pendant 40 ans les familles yupiget de l'Amérique et de la Russie de se rencontrer mais ce projet financé par une université a permis de nouveaux contacts, et des recherches avec des aînés sur des mots inclus dans le livre révélèrent leurs significations perdues.

# Yupik language instruction in Gambell (Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska)

Christopher Petuwaq Koonooka\*

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La première partie de cet article concerne le présent statut de l'enseignement de la langue yupik à Gambell, île Saint-Laurent (Alaska). Des problèmes surgirent après l'abandon, par ses partisans et enseignants, du programme de langue yupik des écoles de Gambell qui y avait du succès depuis 25 ans. Il devint plus difficile de faire fonctionner le programme à cause de changements fédéraux et de l'état dans l'éducation, mais la commission scolaire et l'école gardèrent tout de même les enseignants yupiget afin de ramener le programme yupik à ce qu'il était. La deuxième partie de cet article est une description personnelle d'un récent projet sur la langue et la publication d'une traduction anglaise et de la transcription yupik d'anciens récits du folklore yupik sibérien originellement recueillis et publiés dans la langue yupik en utilisant l'orthographe cyrillique russe, afin qu'ils puissent être utilisés à l'école. Des barrières politiques et sociales avaient empêché pendant 40 ans les familles yupiget de l'Amérique et de la Russie de se rencontrer mais ce projet financé par une université a permis de nouveaux contacts, et des recherches avec des aînés sur des mots inclus dans le livre révélèrent leurs significations perdues.

**Abstract:** Yupik language instruction in Gambell (Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska)

The first part of the paper is about the current status of Yupik language instruction in Gambell, Saint Lawrence Island (Alaska). Problems began after key supporters and teachers left the successful Yupik language program in Gambell schools which had been running for at least 25 years. Federal and state changes to education made it more difficult to run the program, but the school district and school still keep the Yupik staff to bring back their Yupik program as it used to be. The second part of the paper is a personal description of a recent language and publication project to translate into English and transcribe into Yupik old Siberian Yupik folk-stories originally recorded and published in Russian cyrillic-based Yupik orthography, so they could be used in the classroom. Political and social boundaries had prevented for 40 years Yupik families from America and Russia to interact, but this university funded project allowed new contacts, and investigations with elders on words included in the book revealed their lost meanings.

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## Introduction

Yupik language and cultural indigenous communities have been divided by political boundaries, government policies, and different writing systems for over a century, with almost 40 years of complete separation during the Cold War era. To the Yupik people of Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska, their kin Yupik communities in Chukotka on the Russian (Asian) mainland were always a source of cultural and technological influence, demographic strength, and language innovations. These days, it is the Yupik community of Saint Lawrence Island that acts as a beacon of Yupik pride for its relatives in Siberia because of its history of having maintained its Native language, and cultural traditions. The status of the Yupik language on the island is not that certain, however, and its position within the current Alaskan bilingual education system is periodically challenged by state and federal educational policies, local school principals, and the availability of qualified Yupik teachers and learning materials. In this paper, I discuss the current status of language instruction in Gambell, Saint Lawrence Island. I also describe a recent language and publication project to translate into English and transcribe into Yupik old Siberian Yupik folk-stories originally recorded and published in Russian Cyrillic-based Yupik orthography, that will possibly be used in the classroom.

## Brief review of Yupik language instruction in Gambell schools

Siberian Yupik language is spoken in Gambell and Savoonga on Saint Lawrence Island Alaska, and in New Chaplino, Sireniki, and Uelkal on the Chukotka Peninsula in Russia. Originally this was one language, one culture, and one people. Divisions appeared only when Russian—or more exactly Soviet—power was established on the Asian side, and American power on Saint Lawrence Island and, particularly, when the border was closed for any contacts during the Cold War years (1948-1988). On the Soviet side, the Yupik language has been used in schools since the late 1920s and a number of books were published in Yupik using a modified form of the Cyrillic alphabet since the late 1930s. These books included primary schoolbooks and collections of Yupik stories with Russian translations by the linguists Ekaterina Rubtsova (1888–1971) and Georgii Menovshchikov (1911-1991). On the American side, the Yupik language was not used in the schools until much later, in fact, not until the 1970s.

The current Yupik orthography was developed in the 1970s by Dr. Michael Krauss working with some educated Saint Lawrence Island Yupik speakers<sup>1</sup>. Several

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<sup>1</sup> On Saint Lawrence Island, the Yupik language is written using an adaptation of the Latin alphabet. This orthography was created in the early 1970s by Michael Krauss of the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, working with Yupik speakers Linda Aghnaghaghik Badten, Sharon Pungowiyi Orr, and others. A number of books in Yupik were published for the Island schools by the Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC); the Bureau of Indian Affairs; and the Materials Development Center of the Bering Strait School District located in Unalakleet. These include textbooks, readers, and collections of traditional Yupik stories. These, and other materials have been used in the schools of Gambell and Savoonga as part of a Yupik language curriculum that has been in place now for 30 years. School children on Saint Lawrence Island have learned to read and write their Native language in the Latin-letter orthography, with limited partial awareness and/or influence from the very parallel developments that had taken

workshops were held then, at which the first group of Saint Lawrence Island Yupik adult speakers learned to read and write in their native language. The previous orthography had been developed by the Wycliffe Bible translators David and Mitzi Shinen who first came to the island in 1959. After the Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) was established at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, books were developed in the Yupik language to be used at school for young students, starting in the 1970s. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) also produced schoolbooks and children's stories in Yupik in the 1980s for use in schools on the island as well as in Nome, where several Yupik families have moved. Since then, many books and smaller booklets were published written in both Yupik and English, sometimes in Yupik only<sup>2</sup>.

Gambell is one of two villages on Saint Lawrence Island. It has a population of about 650 people. About 95% of the population is Yupik. There are two school buildings; one is used by the community preschool Head Start program and the other houses kindergarten through high school. There are about 40 students attending the preschool and about 170 students in the elementary and high school.

When the Bering Strait School District took charge after the BIA, the district continued the bilingual program. On Saint Lawrence Island, where Native language was the strongest in the region, an office called the Bilingual Materials Development Center (MDC) was opened. It was led by Anders Apassingok, Sr., who had become a classroom teacher during the late BIA years. Apassingok worked with Raymond Oozevaseuk, Jessie Ugloook Lowery and Lorena Koonooka, along with consultation from Edward Tenant. They were to introduce the students to learn English through teaching Yupik in the classroom. They developed curricula for all grades, complete with worksheets, audio and visual aids (Tennant 1989). Another major work they completed was a three volume set of *Lore of Saint Lawrence Island* (Apassingok *et al.* 1985, 1987, 1989); a set of books based on elder interviews on the history and customs of the Yupik. More recent work is another set of classroom books for elementary grades.

The Yupik teachers had to attain a certificate from the State of Alaska; the position is called a "Locally Recognized Expert (LRE)." This certificate is given to local employees who have worked for three years at the school as a classroom aide. From then, they are considered able to teach Yupik (Figure 1). When I started working at the school in 2002, I came as an LRE since I had a BA in Siberian Yupik Eskimo.

The Yupik language program in Gambell schools was at its best 10 years ago; but in 1996, Mr. Apassingok retired. He had been in charge of the Native Language programs for over 20 years. It was a great loss to the program and to the Yupik language education, although it was still running strong then. But in 2001 the newly appointed MDC director had to be with family elsewhere; so, the centre went on

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place in Yupik villages on the Russian side using the Cyrillic alphabet and starting a whole half century earlier than the efforts in Alaska.

<sup>2</sup> The current ANLC website lists over 30 publications in Saint Lawrence Island Yupik language produced by the ANLC staff workers and their Yupik collaborators from 1971 to 2003; see <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/pubs/sy.html>.

without a director. In 2002, a Yupik teacher who had been with the MDC and an educator for many years, retired as well.

That fall of 2002, I joined the Yupik language program staff at Gambell Schools and started teaching middle school and high school freshmen Yupik. I also taught a Yupik class of high school juniors and seniors with whom—I was told by the principal—I could do anything to develop their language skills. So, I thought about making use of the many Yupik storybooks that were on the shelves, but were not part of our language program or curriculum. I asked the students to read the stories out loud in Yupik, taking turns. After one story, I made a worksheet of 10 questions in Yupik and asked students for answers in Yupik. Most of the students aptly and successfully finished their work. After the class ended, however, I was told by the Yupik program supervisor and the school counselor that I was not supposed to be assigning such work to the students, because I had only just started teaching. So, without arguing I stopped what I believed would be a good language and culture preservation class.

The freshmen class was doing basically the same thing, except that its activities were already listed on the Yupik language curriculum. They were reading from the *Lore of Saint Lawrence Island* volumes (Apassingok *et al.* 1985, 1987, 1989) (Figure 2). I also assigned to this class worksheets that were already made. That first year, I felt I had a rough, though progressive, experience in teaching actual Yupik to my students and I enjoyed it. The lesson plans I made were seen by the school principal. They were all based on the curricula developed by the MDC. My objective was retaining the Yupik language and culture. Prior to assigning any reading, I had a list of Yupik vocabulary words from the text that were not commonly used.

The following year, the school was to convert to the “Quality Schools Initiative.” It was a model adopted from the Chugach Area schools in southern Alaska. It had no more grades, only levels. The levels were based not on how old each student was but how educated one was. Advanced students of younger age could be in one class with students three or more years older and those who did not have good grades would end up with much younger students. The teachers were supposed to comply with standards in 10 “content areas” which did not overlap with anything we had in our Yupik language program. Instead of our well-tested local program, we had to use what was called “Cultural Awareness” (CA) standards developed by the Chugach School District from many hundred miles away (see Table 1). Besides, very few—if any—of the Chugach area Native students could speak their native language fluently, whereas many of our students came from families that used Yupik actively in their daily life. Also, the new CA standards and the curriculum developed by the MDC to follow them were not anywhere close to the old standards in the Yupik language education that had prevailed in local schools for many years.



Figure 1. Wanda Yimi Slwooko, Yupik teacher for 25 years, reading to her second grade class the story of creation. Photo: Christopher Petuwaq Koonooka.

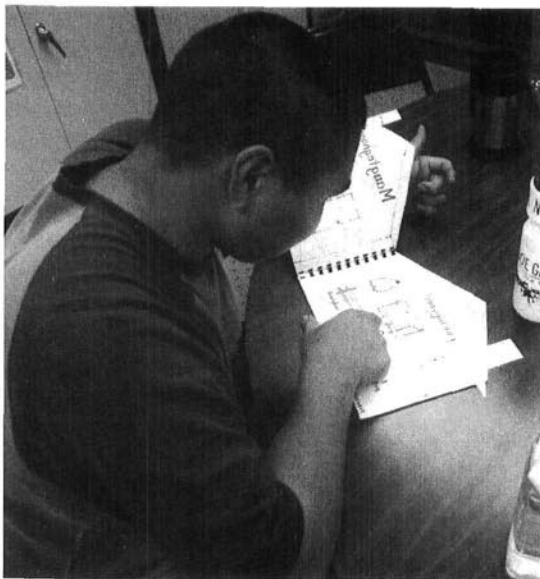


Figure 2. A high school student at Gambell reads a primary schoolbook. Photo: Christopher Petuwaq Koonooka.



Table 1. “Cultural Awareness” standards adopted from the Chugach School District.

Level 2:	Participates in some form of music, visual arts, dance, and/or drama activities. Accurately describes the details of an image.
Level 3:	Understands types of cultural heritage and lineage (elders, clans, totems, family day, and symbols).
Level 4:	Creates, displays, or performs works of art for an audience (i.e. play, talent show, recital, and art show).
Level 5:	Contributes own work to an art presentation or show in the class or school. Presents a written or oral explanation of own artwork.
Level 6:	Identifies ways to overcome cultural differences in communication.
Level 7:	Determines the place of their cultural community in regional, state, national and international, political and economic systems.

In the late fall of 2003, Gambell and Savoonga had an in-service training session for all Savoonga school teachers and part of their bilingual staff, as well as a few personnel from the school district office. The bilingual program was part of that training session, and it was attended by all Yupik language teachers from Gambell and Savoonga schools, along with several people from the Bering Strait School District, including its director for curriculum and instruction for the entire district. The Saint Lawrence Island Yupik educators requested that our language programs be reverted back to our Yupik curriculum, instead of following the CA standards. A few days before the session, I had converted the original Yupik language curriculum into the CA-type standards with hopes of them being adopted (see Table 2). At the session, I presented our curriculum modified along the CA-standard form; but the district’s director for curriculum and instruction asked us how those standards of ours would “prepare a student for college.” To him, they were simply irrelevant. The CA standards look more like part of social studies which incorporate cultures from around the world rather than Native language and culture. It also includes fine arts, but the only real musical instrument was a walrus stomach drum.

**Table 2. Modified “Cultural Awareness” standards specific to Saint Lawrence Island Yupik language and culture.**

<p><b>Level 1:</b></p> <p>Recognizes self and family (names, relationship names, etc.).  Recognizes and understands the role of parents.  Recognizes and respects neighbours.  Recognizes friends, village and school.  Recognizes the world we live in, and our position in the world.  Recognizes seasonal activities.  Recognizes the Yupik months of the year.  Recognizes plants and animals.  Recognizes modes of transportation.</p>
<p><b>Level 2:</b></p> <p>Learns the Yupik alphabet.  Understands the roles of each member of a Yupik family  Understands cooking, eating and sleeping in a Yupik home, past and present.  <i>Identifies and recognizes traditional utensils and tools, including the seal oil lamp.</i>  Understands winds and weather patterns.  Understands and recognizes storytelling.  Recognizes basic body parts.  Understands the importance and traditional means of physical fitness.  Understands traditional health and hygiene.  Identifies different kinds of sound (human, mechanical, animal, etc).  Understands the importance of politeness and respect.  Participates in traditional games and follows safety rules.</p>
<p><b>Level 3:</b></p> <p>Recognizes traditional means of measurements.  Recognizes insects.  Recognizes whales and their importance to our island.  Recognizes walrus and seals.  Recognizes land mammals.  Recognizes birds.  Recognizes fishes, crabs and shrimp.  Understands food preparations.  Recognizes edible sea plants.  Recognizes roots, plants and berries.</p>
<p><b>Level 4:</b></p> <p>Understands bird, fish and animal migrations.  Identifies sleds and toboggans and their importance to the island.  Understands and identifies family relationships and genealogy.  Recognizes traditional clothing.  Recognizes the tides and currents and marine ice.  Understands and recognizes extreme weather and survival.  Understands the advice of elders.  Understands island history and geography.</p>
<p><b>Level 5:</b></p> <p>Identifies and understands Yupik synonyms, antonyms and homonyms.  Understands the Alaska Land Claims Settlement Act.  Understands the Marine Mammal Protection Act and our own respect for the animals.  Learns to build a walrus skin boat.  Recognizes the whaling and walrus hunting gear.</p>
<p><b>Level 6:</b></p> <p>Identifies life in Gambell long ago.  Understands Eskimo know-how.  Understands the practices of traditional whaling.  Identifies life in Savoonga long ago.  Understands traditional reindeer herding and other history and customs.  Recognizes timeless tales.  Identifies Southwest Cape.</p>
<p><b>Level 7:</b></p> <p>Works on various cultural projects (women’s knife [ulaaq], clothing, seal hooks, ice testers, etc.).</p>
<p><b>Level 8:</b></p> <p>Studies advanced Saint Lawrence Island Yupik Grammar.  Studies basic Central Yup’ik Eskimo.  Studies phrases and conversations in Iñupiaq.</p>



## Current status of Yupik language instruction at Gambell schools

During the school year of 2004-2005, I worked in the MDC for most of the morning time. In the afternoon, with another bilingual aide, I also taught a bicultural class, in which we were building a skin-boat frame. This past year there were more changes to our school program. Our assistant principal, Edna Apatiki, the only certified teacher from the community, and therefore a fluent Yupik speaker and an experienced Yupik program supervisor, left the island to take an assignment as principal of a school on the mainland. In school training, everything now became focused on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Teachers who were hired to teach specific subjects, like science, were teaching what they had not been trained to teach. The bicultural program has, thus, been basically cut off from the middle and high schools, and Yupik classes have been changed to the morning time for the elementary levels, when about 10% of the students come to school after that due to tardiness.

Some of our Yupik language instructors were confused whether to stick to the original Saint Lawrence Island cultural curriculum or to use the new Chugach CA standards. Most of our teachers preferred to follow the old program, as I suggested, and some were using the materials they made from other books, translating whatever was available for their classes. Still, the Yupik language program is trying to regain its original cultural curriculum. I spoke with the school district superintendent about the program and how poorly it was performing with the new CA standards. At first he just told me “to get used to them”; but later he agreed to take a look at the standards focused on Saint Lawrence Island cultural topics that I drafted for our school (Table 2). We did not hear anything back from either the school district superintendent or the facilitator about those revised curriculum standards for a long time.

There have been some recent developments in the status of our Yupik language program in 2005. Early in the year, concerns arose about federal and state school programs not funding Alaska Native bilingual education anymore. The Bering Strait School District officials also realized that the Yupik language educators, who are not certified teachers, could not teach (or, may not use) the CA standards. The district finally gave us some freedom of options and we chose to retain our original Yupik curriculum for good. Hence, we will be again revising our Yupik teaching standards and will be using them for the next year and, hopefully, forever. The school district decided wisely not to let the Yupik language go, and bilingual education in Saint Lawrence Island Yupik will continue<sup>3</sup>. So for the 2005-2006 school year, there has been a new schedule devised where Yupik is in for four times a day in the middle and high school. For the elementary grades, it is still taught everyday. These classes coincide with the initiative to improve reading and writing, but in Yupik.

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<sup>3</sup> With the good efforts of Tanya Apatiki and Mabeline James for the kindergarten; Mary Boolowon for the first grade; Wanda Slwooko (Figure 1), who has 25 years of teaching experience, for the second grade; Lorena Koonooka and Jessie Uglowook Lowery for the third grade; Delma Apassingok and Zelma Gologergen for the fourth grade; Shem Rose Koonooka for the fifth grade; and Tamara Avalnun and Sharon Uglowook for the sixth grade, the Yupik language program in Gambell Schools still endures!

## Learning Cyrillic

Growing up in Gambell, I have known early enough from my family that many people in Russian Chukotka, right across the Bering Strait from Gambell, speak the same Yupik language and share much of the same culture as those we have on Saint Lawrence Island. I first came into contact with Cyrillic writing and learned to read a little Cyrillic in 1991 from an old Russian-English dictionary that my mother had been given some years earlier by a bird-watcher who visited Saint Lawrence Island. During my seventh grade year in school in Gambell, I got really interested in Russian writing and started practicing Cyrillic spelling by translating simple words to Russian. After learning the spelling, I practiced more vocabulary building with my own crude word-for-word phrases. That was how I learned a little Russian and how to read Cyrillic.

Later, during my college years at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks (UAF), I started borrowing the Russian Yupik books written in Cyrillic which had been printed some years before in Russia and which Prof. Michael Krauss had obtained for the UAF library. Among the books I borrowed was Ekaterina Rubtsova's volume of *Ungipaghaatet* (Rugtsova 1954), a collection of Yupik folk-stories and narratives told by a Siberian Yupik man named Ayveghhaq, and which I found very interesting. There was also Georgii Menovshchikov's early collection of Yupik folk-texts with its nice illustrations (Menovshchikov 1947), his other book on Sireniki language (Menovshchikov 1964), and Waldemar Bogoraz' book on Yupik language and grammar, also with some folk-stories (Bogoraz 1949). I borrowed these books from the UAF library to read them to my family when I took my trips home to Gambell during winter and summer breaks. Even my parents were entertained by them, since they had not learned many old Yupik stories from their own parents and grandparents.

## Proposal for working on Menovshchikov's Yupik book

I knew that Linda Aghnaghaghpiik Badten had transliterated some texts from Rubtsova's (1954) collection from Cyrillic into the Latin-letter orthography used for writing Yupik on Saint Lawrence Island and that this collection, *Ungazighmiit Ungipaghaatangit*, had been published by the Alaska Native Language Center (Badten and Krauss 1971). A Yupik teacher originally from Gambell, she had been working for years on many books, textbooks, and teaching aides produced in Saint Lawrence Island Yupik. Evidently, she also learned how to read in Cyrillic and how to transliterate it into our writing system. I had been thinking of doing the same. This is how I first became interested in translating Menovshchikov's book of stories, *Materiialy i issledovaniia po iazyku i fol'kloru chaplinskiikh eskimosov* (Materials and Analysis Concerning the Language and Folklore of the Chaplinski Eskimos – Menovshchikov 1988) published in Russia, so that it would be available to the readers on Saint Lawrence Island.

My dreams started to materialize in the fall of 2001, when I became aware of grants being offered to UAF undergraduate students for doing various kinds of research. I thought to apply for a grant to work on Menovshchikov's Yupik book. At

that time I was in my senior year at UAF studying anthropology and had never applied for a grant before. According to the grant's guidelines, I had to have a sponsoring UAF professor. I went ahead and asked my academic advisor, Dr. David Koester from the Department of Anthropology, to be my sponsor. With a lot of help from him and in consultation with two professors from the University's Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC), Michael Krauss and Steven Jacobson, we wrote the grant proposal. Its summary was written as follows:

The linguistic research project proposed will make available a rich set of texts of great historical significance for Eskimo culture by transliterating, from Cyrillic to Latin orthography, editing and translating into English these unique Chaplinski Eskimo texts; I hope to provide a valuable scholarly and cultural resource. The finished product, to be published by the Alaska Native Language Center, will be both an important cultural document for the people of Saint Lawrence Island and research tool for those interested in Eskimo culture and history.

After waiting for a few weeks, I got a letter of approval! With that, I got ready to transliterate, edit, and translate a book. Part of my proposal budget went for tickets to Gambell and back, and the rest went for supplies, like a good Russian-English dictionary<sup>4</sup>. During the winter semester break I took with me to Gambell a copy of Menovshchikov's Cyrillic Yupik book, and worked on transliterating 45 Yupik stories from Cyrillic to Latin orthography. I made a number of corrections and did a fair amount of editing since there were many misspellings and other errors in the Yupik of the book (Koonooka 2003: xviii). I also made arrangements with the Alaska Native Language Center to have my work published there.

With the book to be published, we were going to need someone to buy it. Dr. Krauss, then the ANLC director, contacted David Shinen, a Wycliffe Bible translator who had been living in Gambell for many years, and consulted with him about my upcoming work. Krauss also called the Bering Strait School District and spoke with its bilingual education personnel. He hoped to convince them to purchase my future book as classroom material for the Yupik schools in Gambell and Savoonga. Surprisingly, the school district people were opposed to our project. We were told that, according to the district "mission," bilingual education was only used in the schools as a transition to English language acquisition and Western values! Eventually, Shinen came back with another option. The Gambell Schools principal, Steven Petz, had worked with Native groups in South Dakota, and he supported the instruction in Native languages. He said he would be interested in using my work at school when completed. We were promised a good audience for a good cause. Just before I left Fairbanks to go to Gambell, I had asked John Leipzig, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at UAF, if we could get funds to include illustrations in the publication.

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<sup>4</sup> Menovshchikov's (1988) book of 236 pages has no English summary, no English title page, and no English Table of Contents; so, it may be navigated by someone able to read in Cyrillic only. It contains Cyrillic Yupik folk texts (*ibid.*: 13-234), with each text followed by a Russian phrase-by-phrase translation and several (5-15) explanatory and lexical notes, also in Russian. It also has a short Introduction (*ibid.*: 3-6), covering the history of Russian linguistics and publication works on the Siberian Yupik language; brief biographical entries on storytellers (*ibid.*: 7-9); and comments on the Siberian Yupik phonetics and Cyrillic transliteration system (*ibid.*: 10-12).

## Work with Yupik texts and terms

I went home to Gambell in December 2001. As I went along, I highlighted Yupik words that I did not know. I also found that some of the 49 stories in the book were virtually identical to, or variations of, other stories, and these I excluded. There were some that were practical descriptions of everyday life at the time they were recorded rather than actual folk-stories, and these too were excluded. There was also one very long story that was very hard to follow and had scores of misspellings and other errors, and this one was omitted as well. By my last week in Gambell, before returning to college for the spring semester, I was finished with the transliterations. I brought the 16 unknown Yupik words that I had highlighted to my parents, Job and June Koonooka, and obtained at least four definitions for some of them. The rest of the words I brought to six Gambell elders and to one woman in her late 50s who was born in Russia and had moved to Saint Lawrence Island in 1989. Two of the elders had parents who had been born and raised in Siberia in the early 1900s.

Let me first discuss why certain Yupik words from Siberian stories were not recognized either by myself or by my parents. As mentioned before, the language spoken on Saint Lawrence Island is also spoken on the southeastern tip of Chukotka, in an area extending from Sireniki to New Chaplino (along with some residents of other centres, in particular Uel'kal). After many years of separation due to the Cold War, the two sides of the Yupik people, American and Russian, lost all contact with each other, even by mail or telephone. The border was closed in 1948, although there were still some contacts made during the next few years. The border remained closed for 40 years until 1988, when Alaska Airlines took the so-called "Friendship Flight" from Anchorage to Provideniya, a regional centre in Siberia. That chartered flight had many Alaskan passengers aboard, including several people from Saint Lawrence Island. That visit lasted only for a few hours, and there were not many people from the Yupik villages in Chukotka who came to Provideniya to see the Yupik visitors from Saint Lawrence Island. However, another trip was made later on that same summer of 1988 on a sailboat taking 10 Yupik people from Gambell to Siberia. There were two people who took video cameras and brought them back to Gambell to show everyone the footage of their relatives. We were all surprised to see and hear that they spoke exactly like we did and that they knew our ancestors and said that they were related to us. They also drummed and danced like we did, even singing some of the same songs. We were surprised but disappointed that their younger generations did not speak Yupik anymore, only Russian. After 1988, the traffic across the Bering Strait became more frequent. We have learned that the Yupik people on the Russian side use some words that we do not use on our side of the strait, and they have taught us these unfamiliar words.

My own understanding of this word usage difference is that when visits between the island and Chukotka villages stopped from 1948 to 1988, so did language exchange. Much of the language change before 1948 had come from Siberia, as did technology and other cultural practices, many of them borrowed from the Chukchi people. After the border was closed in 1948, Saint Lawrence Island was alone, so we were left to do our own language development. Gambell people made their own changes, and the other island village, Savoonga, also made quite a few changes.

Returning to the investigation of the words unknown to me, a Gambell elder, Willis Walunga (born in 1924), whose parents had been born in Siberia, recognized five of them and explained that four terms are certainly of Siberian origin. Another elder, Conrad Oozeva (born in 1925) recognized two words on my list. In one case, he gave a description that was different from another person's description, which was something of a challenge for me. I also asked him about a word I knew, *yaqellengetaq*. To most Gambell residents, this word means 'butterfly,' but Conrad translated the word as 'angel' or 'fairy' just as in the Russian translation in Menovshchikov's book (Text no. 6). In Saint Lawrence Island a more common word, *yaqulek*, is used for 'angel.'

Rosa Irrigoo, the woman who was born in Chukotka and had moved to Gambell in 1989, gave me the most comprehensive definitions and explanations of the Siberian words which were new to me. Not only was she raised where the stories came from, but she had lived with a Chukchi family in the village of Yanrakinot while her mother had health problems; so she learned the Chukchi language as well while growing up. Much of the Siberian Yupik words not familiar to Saint Lawrence Island Yupik people turn out to be borrowings from Chukchi. There are many borrowings from Chukchi in our Yupik language, but more on the Siberian side than on the island. Rosa recognized a number of words. She also said that what she did not know might be misspellings, but then it turned out that one of the elders could give the meanings for those. She described in detail three Chukchi loan words. One word, *miitalgi* comes from the word [miitʔaʔxi] which is described as 'it is known to be like so (and so).' The other word, *getgeta* means 'to try patiently.' The third word, *enekiitek*, means 'if I do something.'

Another Gambell elder, Ralph Apatiki (born in 1926) recognized several words. One of them, *igkaghagh-*, meant 'approaching something,' but it is specific for approaching something on the land. There are two other Yupik words for approaching that Ralph described to me. One was *takii* or *taku*, which was used when people are on the ocean (*taku* is the general term for approach); the other is *piighwagh* and is used specifically for approaching bearded seals on water. Those words, except for *takii/taku*, were also new to me.

And yet another Gambell elder, Anders Apassingok, Sr. (born in 1932), had had parents who moved to the island from Siberia in 1929, just like Willis Walunga's. Anders recognized several words that his father had used, and he heard a Siberian relative who visited recently using the word *getgeta* saying "*Getgeta aliighnaaghaa*," which means 'it will eventually clear up (implying that one should have patience).' It had been foggy that day when he was supposed to return to Russia, and Anders said that not long after saying the above phrase, it did clear up. Concerning the other word, *enekiitek*, he remembered his father saying like, "*Enekiitek angyaghpiaskan qayughllequt ikiifsin*," meaning 'When a ship arrives, we will finally have tea (expressing hope).' Anders never knew exactly what the above words meant, but he did remember them being used.

Another elder, Daniel Iyakitan (born in 1920), gave descriptions for three more words on my list of the 'unknowns.' Finally, my grandmother Beda Slwooko (born in 1918) recognized two more words, which she believed had been used by her late



grandfather long ago. One word was the somewhat mysterious *enekiitek* for which I now had three differing explanations, which at least allowed me to get a general idea of what this word means. Beda's meaning was 'it will be given' or 'it has been done.' We do not use this word in Gambell these days.

## **Translating, proofreading and finishing the book**

With the work on Yupik texts and terms finished, I returned to UAF for my last semester in the spring 2002. Though I came up with a few more words and meanings later on, I was mostly finished with the investigation of the unknown words. The next problem was the origins of some of the Siberian place-names that were listed in Menovshchikov's book and that were unknown to me. For those, I contacted another "elder," Dr. Igor Krupnik from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. He had done a lot of research among the Yupik people in Chukotka in the 1970s and 1980s (*e.g.*, Krupnik 2001). He gave me good descriptions of many places I had never seen and some stories behind those old Siberian Yupik villages and places. Igor also sent me a map of Chukotka, with those place-names written in Cyrillic, which I transliterated into our Latin-letter Yupik orthography and added to the book (Koonooka 2003: xiv). He told me a lot of personal details about Menovshchikov's storytellers, and this information was also included in my book (Koonooka 2003: xix–xxi). After my research was completed, I made a brief report of what would be contained in the book to the Gambell Schools, by request of the principal. He was quite interested in my book and wanted to know what it would be like.

Back at the UAF, I prepared for my work to be published, by translating the stories into English. I translated to English directly from the Yupik originals of the stories, but from time to time I would consult the Russian translations in Menovshchikov's book, using a Russian-English dictionary or asking Russian speakers on campus about the meanings of certain Russian words. Steven Jacobson of the ANLC and I had been talking about how we had to carefully go over the transliterations and translations I had made. We discussed how I might use my work on this project to complete a college degree in Yupik Eskimo. I had taken classes dealing with the grammar of my Siberian Yupik language from Jacobson, and also classes in the related language of Central Yup'ik. The usual bachelor's degree in Yupik Eskimo from the UAF is for Central Alaskan Yup'ik, so I would become the first Yupik Eskimo with a bachelor degree in Siberian Yupik (and a minor in Anthropology). Jacobson and I went over my texts word-for-word, making corrections in both the Yupik and English and meeting three times a week for an entire college semester.

After a month of being back on campus, we got a letter from Jeffery Apatiki, an artist from Gambell and our illustrator for the book. He wrote that he could not complete the drawings due to an injury to his hand. I asked a friend of mine, Percy Avugiak, a Central Yup'ik from Chefnak, who was an art major and quite good with drawing and making masks, whether he would be able to finish the drawings for the book. I gave him copies of pictures and other drawings of Siberian Yupik culture from both Saint Lawrence Island and Siberia. With that short training, he immediately



caught up with the culture and completed the set of illustrations. Near the end of the semester, when the proofreading was almost complete, Jacobson suggested that I try recording myself reading a story, with the idea of including an audio CD with the book. I read the story "Ukamangaan," digitally recording it into a computer. With all that work completed, I was finished. I turned over my work to Tom Alton, the ANLC editor, so he could format the texts, maps, illustrations (including a picture for the book cover) into an attractive, convenient to use book. My part in the book had been essentially completed. At the end of the spring semester I graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks with a bachelor's degree in Siberian Yupik Eskimo. In the winter of 2002, when I was back in Gambell, Jacobson asked me to make further audio recordings, and so I read a story from each one of the storytellers represented in the book. The book, complete with accompanying CD, came out in print in September 2003.

## Discussion

As was explained in the first part of this paper, the instruction of Yupik language in school in Gambell has been getting difficult in the past two years. A lot of it is due to the new initiatives passed by the state and the school district. Another reason is the loss of key experienced teachers in the past few years. However, with the new Yupik publication (Koonooka 2003), there is a renewed hope of a "cultural shift," back to the Yupik language, Yupik traditions and Yupik values on Saint Lawrence Island—or, at least, a thought of such a move. In the past 20 years, television, video games, and computers have been taking the place of story telling in our culture. Also, in the past decades young families have been living independently and separate from elders, as opposed to the old pattern when several families once lived in one house, with the grandparents and adult children, and their families staying together. So, many young parents no longer hear their own parents telling stories to the grandchildren, and do not learn them to pass on in time to their own grandchildren. Also with the law enforcement practiced under the guidance of the State of Alaska, our elders do not use traditional stories to teach the lessons of life, as had been the pattern in times past.

With the new Yupik book, the channel of culture/language transference from Siberia to Saint Lawrence Island is now being reopened. Furthermore, elders recall their grandparents telling some of the stories included in the new Yupik book. With the elders passing away, written stories and audio recordings may become the means by which we pass on our stories lest Yupik people forget them. There is a potential and indeed the hope and necessity that more stories will be brought across in the future to reinvigorate our culture and language. Also, the Saint Lawrence Island side can contribute in a similar way to the renewal of the Yupik language on the Russian side.

Schools and books are not the only ways with which we will challenge the language shift on Saint Lawrence Island. There are talks by village leaders and our village council's grant writers about seeking new funds to build a special cultural centre in Gambell. This new centre would hold the history of our island and it would no doubt include some Yupik language programs. The centre is not the only solution, as

there should also be language-training camps and conferences with intensive language instruction. We keep our hopes for a Yupik language immersion program on the island as well.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following for various ways they have helped me in making this paper: Kiyagheq, my parents, Job and June Koonooka, Igor Krupnik, Steven Jacobson, Michael Krauss, Christopher Nelson, Jessie Lowery, Lorena Koonooka, Louis-Jacques Dorais, Bob Woolf, Ward Walker, Edna Apatiki, Ina Koonooka, Steve Petz, Greg Johnson and others whom I may have forgotten.

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